

A chosen people

by ROBERT DE ANDREIS

Gay people suffer from the critical misconceptions of the ignorant. As a new people, emerging after generations of secrecy, we are making only small strides into the mainstream, but what a miracle that is. Not so miraculous is the self-sabotaging, disrespectful and immature way we treat each other, bickering like siblings orphaned by a hostile world.

We are oblivious as to how our disrespect for each other undermines our collective goals as gay people. I decree this curse after I die: The next gay man who makes fun of a lesbian will turn into one! We have always been here but despite our recent, historical emergence — with financial, cultural and political clout — our own cultural depth isn't always rich enough to draw on to get us through the days. Where are all our gay spiritual songs, songs of gay love and gay pride? How can we sing the blues if no one is writing them? We are still so young as a people, but we have grown up quickly with an epidemic under our belts. Still, the simple challenges and courage to lead honest gay lives is never given its due. We are rebels without applause.

When I went to my first Gay Pride Parade as a teen, I thought gay acceptance as just around the corner. Back then, the early movement attracted people with nothing to lose, God bless them all — shrill, radical political extremists or wacky, militant, gender-benders burning their flammable falsies. Since I've always mistrusted political characters, I never got involved in gay politics. For years it was the only community game in town. A gift from AIDS is that it enabled a different kind of gay person to get together in compassion to form groups and organizations built on volunteerism, spirituality and compassion. Finally there's a world beyond the bars and the special interest back rooms for us to meet, be of service and express a deeper part of ourselves in fellowship with our community. More significant things can be changed by volunteering than by voting.

Remember, even gay piranhas swim in political cesspools. I am proud to admit I distrust politics — it's too unsavory, a sneaky, self-serving, suspicious, manipulative snake pit with a pink triangle money clip picked from your back pocket. Changing attitudes about who we are can never be legislated, only demonstrated through honest

living. Don't vote for candidates just because they're gay. Are they honest people? Sleazeball, power-hungry candidates, on the ballot or behind the scenes, never quite smell right. That's because power attracts evil like fruit flies to shit.

The main error in defining ourselves is to compare ourselves to other kinds of minority groups. We are not a race, we are not a creed, we are not our sexual behavior, we are not gender issues, we are not specific demographics, we are not a true voting block al-



Columnist Robert De Andreis

though that fallacy sells well for fundraising.

Most gay Americans lead dull, ordinary American Gothic lives. Outside the big cities, most gay people lead lives of quiet desperation. Inside the big cities, gay people also lead lives of quiet desperation. One day we will be welcome everywhere we go, provided we don't go too far.

I had a friendly lunch with my folks recently and we talked about what it means to be gay. They were able to see how a gay marriage bill traveling through legislation in Hawaii is just a faint beginning and not the end of the rainbow. Laws can be changed more quickly than attitudes. Some of us never realize our fullest potential in the workplace because we have chosen to quit rather than remove pictures of our lovers from our desks. Some of us own small businesses instead of listening to straight co-workers talk about what they did that weekend with their families, which we can't share with

ours. Maybe a landlord won't rent to you and your "friend." Maybe you're getting the same salary as your co-worker but her husband is covered on her health insurance and yours isn't. During the holidays, you can't invite people over to your home for an office party without removing evidence of your lover's presence. In so many subtle ways, we are forced to be deceitful to survive, despite coming out to ourselves. Total honesty is a badge some of us never wear and the cost to the spirit is enormous; no doubt it contributes to much isolation, sadness and self-destruction in our ranks. But most of all, it erodes the foundation of the world we are trying to build.

We face these dilemmas every day. We're the last great oppressed minority, and because of the permanent, hateful teachings of traditional religions, that hatred is here to stay. Our choices are to fight or flee, be who we are or live a lie, banter with jerks in the locker room or walk away, stand up to homophobia or sulk in silence and withdraw into ourselves and wonder why we're loners. Do we choose acceptance into straight society for the money, the raise, the promotion? Do we choose to be silent when a homophobic family member makes disparaging remarks at a family function, or do we choose not to go next time?

We are a chosen people, not because we are special, but because we are ordinary, and we've had to make a lot of choices to live our ordinary lives with dignity, pride and safety. The emergence of our world could only have happened in this country, with its social climate and free speech protection. In many ways we are the most American of all peoples — diverse in race and creed, seeking protection from persecution. Oppression, not sexual behavior, is the only true factor that unifies us all.

It always annoys me to come home from a parade and see it on the news. The crews would find the most eccentric characters and present them as a representative sampling of who we are, with the intent of embarrassing us. But who we are can never be caught on tape. Our choice to live honest lives can only be captured in the minds of our eager gay souls hungry to tell the truth of our diverse lives.

Write me: Robert De Andreis, Clifford Terrace #8, San Francisco, CA 94117